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New York

President:	Mr. Andjaba	(Namibia)
Members:	Argentina	Mr. Petrella
	Bahrain	Mr. Buallay
	Brazil	Mr. Moura
	Canada	Mr. Fowler
	China	Mr. Shen Guofang
	France	Mr. Doutriaux
	Gabon	Mr. Dangue Réwaka
	Gambia	Mr. Jagne
	Malaysia	Mr. Hasmy
	Netherlands	Mr. van Walsum
	Russian Federation	Mr. Gatilov
	Slovenia	Mr. Žbogar
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Richmond
	United States of America	Ms. Soderberg

Agenda

The situation in Afghanistan

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The meeting resumed at 3.15 p.m.

Mr. Hasmy (Malaysia): This open meeting of the Council on the situation in Afghanistan is a timely one, and my delegation commends you, Sir, for organizing it. It is our hope that this debate will serve to bring the issue into sharper focus for the international community at a time when the conflict seems to be even more intractable than ever before.

Without doubt, the civil war in Afghanistan has been one of the most devastating and tragic in the history of human conflicts throughout the world. Twenty years of bloody war have left the country in a devastated state, with no discernible signs of an early end to the conflict. There had, indeed, been a number of positive developments recently, developments that had led the international community to believe that the end of the conflict was close at hand. But these proved to be false dawns that did not lead to the new day that the war-weary people of Afghanistan have been yearning for.

Like other friends of Afghanistan, Malaysia is deeply dismayed and saddened by the situation in that fraternal country and by the plight of its people. Malaysia believes that a durable peace in Afghanistan can be achieved only through political, not military, means, and therefore strongly supports any efforts for a political resolution of the conflict through dialogue and the formation of a broad-based Government that would take into account the interests of the various religious and ethnic groups in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, what has firmly taken root in that country is a vicious cycle of violence and conflict in which the inability of the Afghan factions to agree on a political settlement is both the cause and the effect of interference in the affairs of the country by external actors.

The long, debilitating war in Afghanistan has exacted a heavy toll on the country and its people. With its scarce resources being channelled to the war effort, the entire country has been left in the backwater of economic development, with dire consequences for its long-enduring people. The costs to the people of Afghanistan, particularly to a whole generation of young Afghanis, are enormous and can be addressed only when the sounds of guns have finally fallen silent, whenever that will be. In the meantime, when all economic development is suspended and economic and social concerns remain in abeyance, a new generation is growing up with little education except in weaponry training, and with no memory of life in a peaceful State.

Beyond the emotional scars left on the people of Afghanistan, the war has also physically scarred the country. Vast tracts of land have been sowed, not with life-sustaining crops, but with life-threatening landmines which have claimed many, many lives and limbs. These problems are compounded by the existence of other ills, not the least of which are the pernicious effects of drugs, guns and violence; the use of child soldiers; and a population dependent on handouts from humanitarian agencies — perhaps for many, many years to come. In addition to these ills, there are the catastrophic effects related to internally displaced persons, effects caused by the continuing war and exacerbating the already grave humanitarian situation.

What is patently clear to many, apart from the Afghan parties, is that the conflict is not likely to be settled by military means. Military advantages gained on the ground are merely temporary and will be reversed over time. The history of Afghanistan, past and present, has made this abundantly clear and should be well-heeded by the Afghan factions so as to spare their people further sufferings and hardships. After many years of conflict, the lessons ought to have been learned. What should have become clear by now is that the path to peace for Afghanistan does not lie on the battlefield but at the conference table. This reality should be accepted now by all of the Afghan parties. They should rise above their narrow factional interests and abandon their vain search for that illusory military victory that will settle the conflict once and for all, for it will not come.

The international community should continue to play a constructive role by exerting a positive influence on the process; by encouraging the process of dialogue and conciliation on the part of the contending parties in Afghanistan; and, on the part of the external actors, by pursuing a policy of scrupulous non-interference, for only through this process can there be prospects of a durable peace in that unfortunate country.

The signing of the Tashkent Declaration was an important contribution to the search for a lasting peace in Afghanistan. The principles contained therein are laudable ones and were warmly welcomed by the international community and the Council. Unfortunately, the resumption, in spite of its signing, of military hostilities immediately afterwards has raised questions about the worth of a paper document, steeped in lofty principles, in the absence of the requisite political will to adhere to them. Indeed, the renewed fighting calls into question the usefulness and relevance of the "six plus

two" group itself. The continuation of the conflict, with the involvement of external actors, makes a mockery of the Tashkent Declaration. It is a matter of profound disappointment and regret that despite the pronouncements of the "six plus two" group not to provide military support to any Afghan party and to prevent the use of their territories for such purpose, in reality the infusion of massive war *matériel* to fuel the Afghan conflict has exacerbated the situation.

Given its important and influential membership, the group was hailed, upon its establishment, as a significant development in the search for a political settlement of the conflict in Afghanistan that would be buttressed by strong international commitment and support. Despite its shortcomings, the "six plus two" group remains a useful forum and mechanism in the peace process and should therefore be strongly supported by the international community and the Council. The group's members should be strongly urged to reconcile their differences and to recommit themselves to the important principles they signed in Tashkent, lest the group, which was painstakingly put together, become completely irrelevant. Perhaps a new formula, as mentioned by Under-Secretary-General Prendergast, or a new strategy is necessary to propel the peace process forward.

In this regard, the role of the United Nations, including in particular that of the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy, Ambassador Lakhdar Brahimi, should continue to be recognized and strongly supported by the international community. My delegation would like to wish Ambassador Brahimi a speedy recovery.

Indeed, at this critical juncture, the facilitating role of the United Nations in the search for a political settlement of the Afghan conflict assumes even greater importance and should be further enhanced.

However, with the best of intentions, the international community can do only so much; it can play only a supportive role in the process. The feuding parties in Afghanistan will have to recognize that the search for peace must begin and end with themselves. Clearly, any credible peace process will have to begin with a ceasefire, followed by the commencement of dialogue between the various belligerents, predicated on the common objective of attaining genuine national reconciliation and the establishment of a broad-based, multi-ethnic representative government.

Such a solution must be sought by the Afghan parties to the conflict and supported by the people of Afghanistan. It cannot — indeed, should not — be imposed from outside, as any peace that is not supported by the parties themselves and their followers will not stand the test of time. If Afghanistan is to continue to exist as a sovereign State and not be reduced eventually to the fate of a "failed state" characterized by endless infighting and contending for power and positions among its leaders, it is imperative that its proud people seize the opportunity now to steer a clear course towards national reconciliation and unity.

It is a matter of great regret to my delegation that a year after the Mazar-e-Sharif massacres of Iranian diplomats and a journalist, the incident remains unresolved despite the expressed commitment of the Taliban leadership to continue its investigation and its support for an international inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the murders of the Iranians. It is imperative for the international community to continue to call for a full investigation of the incident leading to the prosecution of those guilty of the crime.

While the war in Afghanistan is essentially an internal conflict, its continuation over a period of 20 years is due in no small part to the role played by external actors. It is important, therefore, that the international community and the Council in particular exert their influence on all the parties concerned so that peace and stability can be given a chance to return to that troubled land.

Mr. Dangue Réwaka (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): The international community expected the high-level meeting held in Tashkent in July 1999 to promote the peaceful settlement of the conflict that has torn Afghanistan asunder for several years now. However, we cannot but note that that same month the conflicting Afghan parties chose to pursue the logic of war, giving reason to believe that they preferred the military option to a political solution.

However, in respect of conflict settlement and in particular as regards Afghanistan, experience has shown that a lasting peace cannot be achieved through the use of force. It is on this basis that Gabon invites the Afghan parties to observe a ceasefire and to resume a dialogue as soon as possible, as this is the only road to national reconciliation and the return of peace to that country.

It is in this spirit that we welcome and support the efforts made by the "six plus two" group, the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy to Afghanistan, and we encourage them to persevere in that direction. While it is true that the settlement of the conflict is first and foremost the responsibility of the Afghans themselves, it is equally true that neighbouring countries could make a significant contribution by appealing to the various parties to resolve their dispute by peaceful means.

Another subject of concern that is also the result of the use of military means is the grave humanitarian situation afflicting the Afghan population. A number of sources, including the report presented to us this morning by Under-Secretary-General Prendergast, also illustrate this. All have indicated that thousands of men, women and children have been displaced and lack basic necessities, while others live as refugees in neighbouring countries.

In this connection, we ask all of the Afghan parties to abide by international conventions on human rights and international humanitarian law, and to see to it that their territory is not used as a base for international terrorism. Furthermore, we invite them to allow the personnel of humanitarian organizations free access to populations in need and to guarantee the safety and security of that personnel. To continue to deprive these women and children of acceptable living conditions would be for the Afghan parties a decision fraught with consequences that the international community could hardly accept.

Mr. Jagne (Gambia): Thank you once again, Mr. President, for scheduling this open meeting on the situation in Afghanistan. My delegation was among the first to support the idea when it was proposed by one of our colleagues. We did so with the conviction that by coming out into the open, by putting all the cards on the table, by allowing everybody to speak out, together, through concerted international effort, we should be in a position, provided that the political will exists, to find a lasting solution to the Afghan enigma. A solution to the Afghan imbroglio has continued to elude the international community for too long. This beleaguered country has had a checkered history. Unfortunately, there is no end in sight to the protracted conflict.

My delegation sincerely believes that the "six plus two" process constitutes the most appropriate framework to deal with this crisis. Unless and until all the parties concerned are ready to get their acts together, the vicious cycle of violence will prevail and the entire region will remain in a quandary, trapped in the Afghan quagmire.

In this situation of near-paralysis, the Security Council should demonstrate its ingenuity and chart a new course in its approach to the Afghan crisis. We certainly do not underestimate the complexity of the situation, but we are of the view that the underlying political problems must first be resolved.

Once that is done, it will create the enabling environment to deal effectively with other issues such as human rights abuses, terrorism and illicit drugs, to mention only a few. This is why my delegation attaches great importance to the "six plus two" process, and is therefore appealing to all the parties to return to the negotiating table without further delay. That is in the best interest not only of all the people of Afghanistan, but of all the other parties concerned also. A military solution should not even be contemplated even though the reality on the ground is something else.

The greatest challenge facing the Security Council today is to persuade the parties to go back to the negotiating table and when we have succeeded in reasoning with them to do so, to persuade them to negotiate in good faith. That can be done, if only we stop sidelining, side-stepping or demonizing this faction or that faction. It does not help the process any meaningful way. It only sets the clock back, and the Lord knows that the clock has already been set back many years.

Mr. Zbogar (Slovenia): Allow me at the outset to thank Under- Secretary-General Prendergast for the thought-provoking briefing he gave us this morning, as always. We would also like to express our appreciation and full support to the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Brahimi, for his tireless efforts to return the light of hope and peace to the people of Afghanistan. We join others in expressing our good wishes for his speedy recovery.

The delegation of Slovenia expresses its appreciation to you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate on the situation in Afghanistan. The problems to be addressed today are very grave and indeed alarming, and deserve the most serious consideration by the Security Council. These problems are also not new. They have characterized the sad state of affairs in Afghanistan for far too long. It looks as if the international community and the Security Council were genuinely unable to find the right responses for many years. At the same time, it is clear that the situation in Afghanistan cannot be described as an essentially internal affair of a State. Quite to the contrary, that situation arose about two decades

ago as an essentially international problem and has remained so to date.

The international character of and the apparent lack of solution for the situation in Afghanistan call for a reinforced effort of the United Nations, and especially of the Security Council, which has the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. It is therefore most appropriate that today's discussion takes place as an orientation debate, open to all United Nations Member States. We hope that the results of today's debate will give full meaning to the concept of open orientation debate, which the Security Council should convene as often as necessary.

The current general situation in Afghanistan is appalling. The military conflict continues and is gaining new dimensions, leaving the people of Afghanistan in a dire humanitarian situation. The appeals of the Secretary-General, the Security Council and others to the effect that there will be no military solutions and that peaceful means must be used remain unheeded. Continuing the deplorable tradition of the annual vicious cycle of resumed fighting, the Taliban again ignored efforts by the international community to bring peace to Afghanistan and launched the summer military offensive. Adding to the destabilizing effects of the situation are disturbing reports about thousands of non-Afghan nationals taking part in the fighting. We are furthermore concerned at recent reports of the involvement in the conflict of students, some as young as 14, recruited in expectation of a new offensive.

In the first week alone, the offensive has caused the displacement of between 100,000 and 140,000 people. In addition, 40,000 people were forcibly displaced to Kabul and Jalalabad, using the unacceptable practice of separating women and children from men. We are deeply concerned by continuing reports of widespread violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. The present stage of the military conflict is an extension of the situation of last year which led to extremely grave humanitarian consequences. The massacre in Mazar-e-Sharif, following the seizure of that town by Taliban in August 1998, resulted in the death of more than 5,000 people. It is extremely disturbing that the pattern of ethnic cleansing established last year appears to continue. The conditions for investigation of massacres, which took place last year, were not met and the preventive effect of such an investigation was thwarted. The investigation of the killing of Iranian diplomats in Mazar-e-Sharif, which was strongly condemned by the Security Council and the international community at large, also has yet to make substantial progress.

The situation in Afghanistan is further aggravated by organized production of drugs and drug trafficking and by the harbouring of international terrorism. Numerous and credible reports have established the Taliban's responsibility for these social, humanitarian and political ills that have dangerous implications well beyond the Afghanistan borders.

In the effort to contribute to the solution of the situation in Afghanistan, the Security Council has established the relevant political principles, including, most importantly, the principle that there is no military solution to the situation. Furthermore, the Council has rendered its support to the group of "six plus two" States as the essential diplomatic mechanism devised to develop the necessary political agreement among all the parties concerned. It is regrettable that the principle of peaceful solution remains unheeded and that the "six plus two" mechanism remains unsuccessful. Moreover, the credibility of that mechanism was seriously affected last July after the high-level Tashkent meeting of the "six plus two" group, where both the United Front and the Taliban also participated. It appears that, simultaneously, preparations for subsequent military action in Afghanistan were pursued.

What kind of orientation for the future search of peace can be achieved today? There are, in our opinion, four main lessons learned from the past, which should guide policy-making for the future.

First, the growing disunity and the flaws in the practice of the "six plus two" group have not discredited the principles which that mechanism is supposed to pursue. Quite to the contrary, the notion that there is no military solution in Afghanistan and the principle that peace must be established by peaceful means are as valid today as they were yesterday.

Secondly, the key to ending the Afghan tragedy lies in resolving its external aspects. The conflict in Afghanistan is perpetuated by continuous foreign interference in the form of active political and particularly military support provided to the Afghan parties through supplies of arms, ammunition and other warring *matériel*, as well as military personnel. We call upon all concerned to desist from such practices in the future.

Thirdly, military advances by the Taliban do not in themselves constitute the legitimate basis of the Government. Without the minimum legitimacy of power in all parts of Afghanistan, there can be no assurance of the long-term effectiveness of the Government in the country. The necessary legitimacy ought to include respect for basic norms of international law, including humanitarian and human rights law. Any new Government aspiring to international recognition must be aware of that.

Fourthly, the destabilizing effects of the situation in Afghanistan and its immediate and wider environment must be addressed precisely and with responsibility. The immediate political effects of the continuing war on Afghanistan's neighbours are serious enough. Additionally, however, serious consideration must be given to the cancerous effects of drug-trafficking and terrorism, which destabilize the wider region and beyond.

The situation in Afghanistan remains tragic, while its wider repercussions are becoming ever more dangerous. The essential political and conceptual conditions for a peaceful solution are already known. Our delegation believes that today's meeting of the Security Council should demonstrate the resolve of the international community to insist on those conditions in the effort to help in finding a solution for the situation in Afghanistan.

Mr. Fonseca (Brazil): I wish to thank Under-Secretary-General Prendergast for his comprehensive briefing, which illustrates the gravity of the situation in Afghanistan. I would also like to commend the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, for his impressive work. Like preceding speakers, my delegation wishes him a speedy recovery. Mr. Brahimi's report highlights the need for urgent action on the part of the international community.

My delegation is equally appreciative of the presence here today of the Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan.

At this critical juncture, Brazil once again expresses its concern over the protracted conflict in Afghanistan, and its destabilizing potential for the entire region.

The renewal of military actions over this summer is worse given the increasingly sombre humanitarian situation, with thousands of innocent civilians displaced from their homes amid mounting evidence of widespread violations of human rights.

Moreover, the repeated reports of violations of human rights and induction of child soldiers are cause for serious concern. We understand that there is no military solution to the situation; only by peaceful means can the conflict be settled. It is undeniable that the Taliban movement is particularly to blame for the deteriorating climate in Afghanistan. We call upon its leadership to resume the path of dialogue.

It is therefore regrettable that the considerable effort made by the international community to bring about a lasting agreement has not yielded the desired results.

Although recognizing the need for renewed diplomatic initiatives, we continue to believe that the general thrust of the Declaration that followed the Tashkent meeting of the "six plus two" group last month offers a way forward and therefore a real hope for lasting peace.

To this end, it is equally important that all forms of foreign interference in Afghanistan should stop. Only in this way will the way be opened to reconciliation and the founding of a truly multi-ethnic and democratic government in Afghanistan, one which helps bring peace, tolerance and hope to its war-ravaged people.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of Namibia.

Like other speakers before me, I wish to thank Under-Secretary-General Prendergast for the excellent and comprehensive briefing he has provided to us. It certainly is timely, and it will assist the Council in doing its work in terms of its overall mandate. I would also like to take this opportunity to wish Ambassador Lakhdar Brahimi a speedy recovery.

The continuing war in Afghanistan, and, indeed, its escalation, remains a very serious concern to my delegation. We are in particular appalled by the long and persistent suffering of the civilian population.

The recent reports about the dramatic deterioration of the humanitarian situation because of the war should convince the warring parties to cease hostilities immediately and to return to the negotiating table under the auspices of the United Nations. We find the reports about forced displacements of civilians and the continuing human rights abuses of women and children particularly disturbing and call on those responsible to immediately

cease these practices and to adhere to international norms in this sphere.

My delegation does not believe that the Afghan problem can be comprehensively solved through military means. In this regard, we agree that a permanent solution and lasting peace can be achieved only through the resumption of negotiations in order to resolve issues of contention and by the adoption of a broad based and fully representative government acceptable to all the people of Afghanistan.

We therefore commend the work of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Ambassador Brahimi, and the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan, to achieve peace and to facilitate national reconciliation and reconstruction. To assist these efforts, the "six plus two" group should be encouraged to reinvigorate their efforts to find a common approach towards a settlement of the Afghan conflict. In fulfilling this role, it has also become necessary for the group to dispel the recent doubts raised as to its relevance in the Afghan peace efforts. In this regard, it is essential that the commitments of the recently concluded Tashkent Declaration be implemented fully.

Finally, my delegation remains committed, together with the rest of the international community, to implement whatever means are necessary to assist the peace process in Afghanistan.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Finland. I invite her to take a seat at the Council table and to make her statement.

Ms. Rasi (Finland): Mr. President, I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia — and the associated countries of Cyprus and Malta, as well as the European Free Trade Association country member of the European Economic Area, Iceland, align themselves with this statement.

For too many years the conflict in Afghanistan has caused enormous suffering for the Afghan people, who continue to bear the consequences of the civil war. The civilian population longs for peace, justice and order. Furthermore, the chronic fighting threatens the stability of the region and its economic development, causing repercussions far beyond Afghanistan and its neighbours.

The European Union is deeply concerned at the recent escalation of the military confrontation in Afghanistan. We are dismayed that the Taliban have ignored the call in the Tashkent Declaration for the Afghan conflict to be settled through peaceful political negotiation and have instead launched a major offensive. The European Union is particularly concerned about the suffering that the fighting has caused to the civilian population and about the deteriorating humanitarian condition of the increasing number of internally displaced people.

The European Union is profoundly disturbed by the reports of forced deportation of civilians by the Taliban from their places of residence. We urge the Taliban to end this practice immediately and to allow those forcibly deported to return. We are also concerned about the reports of forcible separation of men from their families and other forms of harassment.

The European Union reiterates its position, as expressed in its Common Position of 25 January 1999, that there is no military solution to this conflict, and that only a political settlement, aimed at the establishment of a fully representative, broad-based Government, can lead to peace and reconciliation. We therefore appeal to all factions to agree on an immediate cease-fire and enter negotiations under United Nations auspices.

The European Union reaffirms its strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and national unity of Afghanistan. The Union strongly condemns all foreign interference in Afghanistan and urges that the supply of weapons, munitions and other material for military use to the warring factions, as well as the involvement of foreign military, para-military and secret service personnel should stop.

In this context, we wish to recall that the European Union continues to enforce the embargo on the export of arms, munitions, and military equipment provided for in its Common Position of 17 December 1996 on Afghanistan, and urges other countries to adopt a similar policy of restraint. Moreover, we encourage all countries in the region to support the United Nations efforts to promote peace in Afghanistan and to use any influence they have in a positive way to convince the Afghan parties to cooperate with the United Nations.

Furthermore, the European Union strongly urges the Afghan factions to put a complete halt to the use of landmines and to support and participate in mine-clearing programmes in Afghanistan.

No society can achieve an acceptable degree of peace, justice and stability without full respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms. The European Union is deeply disturbed by reports of the killing and harassment of innocent civilians and persistent human rights violations, as well as breaches of humanitarian law in Afghanistan. We are also gravely concerned over reports of the involvement of children in the conflict, and we urge the warring factions to take immediate steps to end this practice.

The European Union calls on all Afghan factions, and in particular the Taliban, to recognize, protect and promote all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to life, liberty and security of persons and fully respect the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international instruments to which Afghanistan has subscribed.

In this context, we welcome the efforts of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to investigate reports on grave human rights violations in Afghanistan which occurred during 1997 and 1998.

The European Union also strongly supports the Secretary- General's proposal to add a new function to the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNSMA) by establishing a separate civil affairs unit within the Mission whose primary objectives would be to promote respect for humanitarian standards and deter massive and systematic violations of human rights and humanitarian law in the future. We are looking forward to the establishment of this unit.

The European Union denounces the continuing gender discrimination in Afghanistan. We urge Afghan factions, and in particular the Taliban, to end discriminatory policies and to recognize, protect and promote the equal rights of men and women, including access to education and health facilities, employment, personal security and freedom from intimidation and harassment. The European Union will continue to take into account discriminatory policies for our future decisions regarding the supply of aid and to support aid programmes in Afghanistan which integrate gender concerns and actively attempt to promote equitable participation of both men and women.

For years the European Union has been the largest donor of humanitarian aid to Afghanistan. The European Commission had to suspend funding for projects in Kabul in July 1998 because it had become increasingly difficult for agencies to deliver humanitarian aid in an efficient, effective and principled manner, especially in the health and education sectors. Subsequently, the European Commission had to scale down humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan for security reasons. Humanitarian activities were, nevertheless, resumed later, in the beginning of 1999, and we desire to continue helping the Afghan people. We wish to recall, however, that aid can continue only where it can be delivered in an effective manner, without discrimination, and where humanitarian organizations are able to carry out their work freely and safely. The absence of national reconciliation has a negative impact on donors engaged.

The European Union notes the Secretary-General's decision of 12 March to allow a limited and phased return of United Nations international staff to Afghanistan. They were withdrawn from Afghanistan in August 1998, following the fatal attacks on United Nations personnel and other threats to the safety and security of the Organization's workers in Afghanistan. However, the European Union remains deeply concerned about the continuous restrictions imposed on the activities of United Nations and other humanitarian personnel. In this context, the Union calls upon the Taliban to fully implement the agreements signed with the United Nations on the safety and security of United Nations personnel. We urge the warring factions to ensure freedom of movement as well as free and safe access of national and international humanitarian personnel to all those in need, without restrictions based on gender, race, religion or nationality, and to cooperate fully and sincerely with humanitarian organizations.

The European Union strongly supports efforts to improve the effectiveness of aid through close coordination and complementarity between United Nations peace efforts and the aid effort, as envisaged in the strategic framework common to the international donor community and United Nations organizations.

Furthermore, the European Union reiterates its call for the Taliban to thoroughly investigate the murders of the United Nations staff members, as well as the killing of Iranian diplomats during the Taliban attack against Mazar-e-Sharif in August 1998.

The European Union attaches high importance to the fight against illegal drugs and terrorism. Therefore, we are concerned at the increasing production of and trafficking in drugs in Afghanistan, which threatens regional stability and damages the health and well-being of the populations of Afghanistan, of neighbouring States and elsewhere.

Furthermore, the European Union calls on all Afghan parties to refrain from financing, providing training or shelter for terrorist organizations, or otherwise supporting terrorist activities. We reiterate our call on all Afghan factions, and in particular the Taliban, to close down training camps for foreign terrorists inside Afghanistan and to take necessary steps to ensure that those responsible for terrorist acts are brought to justice.

In conclusion, the European Union is determined to play an effective role in efforts to stop the fighting and to restore peace, stability and respect for international law and human rights in Afghanistan. We are committed to using all our influence to bring about a sustainable peace in Afghanistan, put an end to foreign intervention and encourage intra-Afghan dialogue, in particular through support for the central role of the United Nations. We will also continue to give our full support to United Nations efforts in promoting peace and security in Afghanistan.

Finally, we would like to thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for his commitment to bringing about an end to the conflict, and the members of UNSMA for their continued courage and dedication.

The President: The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Kazakhstan. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Kazykhanov (Kazakhstan): First, I would like to express our appreciation to you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting of the Security Council to consider the situation in Afghanistan.

Kazakhstan expresses its grave concern over the continued armed conflict in Afghanistan, which has recently escalated sharply as a result of the large-scale military offensive launched by the Taliban movement despite the repeated pleas by the Security Council to cease the fighting and resume negotiations under the auspices of the United Nations.

It is particularly disturbing that the military activities have resulted in suffering on the part of the civilian population and an increase in the number of refugees. We cannot but condemn the instances of gross violations of human rights, forced deportation, ethnic and religious-based persecutions and violations of the norms of international law, as well as the actions that prevent the unimpeded and safe delivery of humanitarian aid and the normal conduct of the work of the United Nations in Afghanistan.

A year ago, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, strongly condemned in a statement the capture by the Taliban movement of the Consulate General of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Mazar-e-Sharif and the murder of Iranian diplomats and a journalist. We firmly support the call on the Taliban movement to cooperate with the United Nations in investigating these crimes with a view to prosecuting those responsible.

The civil war in Afghanistan continues to pose a threat to the security and stability of the other States in the region. We fully share the concern expressed by the Secretary-General in his recent statement that, should the transnational aspect be allowed to take root, the potential danger will increase greatly, and it will be much more difficult to prevent the conflict from spreading beyond Afghan borders. In this connection, Kazakhstan reaffirms its strong commitment to the agreements reached at the Almaty summit of 4 October 1996 and the meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defence of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, held in Tashkent on 22 August 1998. We believe that efforts must continue to be made to convince the parties to the conflict that no military solution exists and that reliance on force has no future.

We again express the firm conviction that any international efforts to resolve the situation in Afghanistan must take place under the auspices of the United Nations, as an impartial mediator in the attainment of peace and national harmony in Afghanistan, and on the basis of the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly. In this connection, we fully support the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Mr. Brahimi, and the work of the United Nations Special Mission in Afghanistan (UNSMA), and express our readiness to continue to extend the necessary assistance to them.

Kazakhstan attaches great importance to the collective efforts by Afghanistan's neighbours and other interested States aimed at establishing peace in that country. In the search for a political solution to the

Afghan problem, we took a positive view of the holding of direct talks between the United Front and the Taliban movement in Ashkabad in January and March 1999 and in Tashkent in July 1999. An important step towards attainment of a just and lasting peace in Afghanistan was the convening of the Tashkent meeting of the "six plus two" group and the adoption of the Declaration on Fundamental Principles for a Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict in Afghanistan. We are prepared to make a concrete contribution to this process.

Kazakhstan strongly condemns any external interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan and supports the appeal of the Security Council for the immediate cessation of the delivery of military supplies from outside and the halting of active support to the factions in Afghanistan. In our view, the fulfilment by the States of the region of their obligations to refrain from providing military support to the parties to the conflict and to prevent the use of their territory for these purposes would greatly facilitate the speedy, peaceful resolution of the conflict.

The continuing armed conflict in Afghanistan creates conditions conducive to the illegal production and trafficking of narcotics, and also to the proliferation of terrorism. There is a need to strengthen effective and coordinated measures to combat illicit drug trafficking. We are convinced that the many calls on the Taliban movement by the international community to stop giving refuge to international terrorists and their organizations and to cooperate with efforts to bring indicted terrorists to justice must be strictly complied with.

Kazakhstan fully supports the efforts of the United Nations to provide humanitarian assistance to the civilian population of Afghanistan suffering as a result of the military activities, as well as to the many refugees who have been compelled to leave the places where they were born or to emigrate to neighbouring countries. It remains committed to promoting Afghanistan's future rehabilitation and recovery.

The President: I thank the representative of Kazakhstan for his kind words addressed to me.

The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Norway. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Honningstad (Norway): My delegation welcomes the report of the Secretary-General. We also welcome the initiative to convene this meeting of the Security Council to discuss further measures towards finding a solution to the conflict. Norway has long been involved in Afghanistan through the different agencies of the United Nations, as well as through a number of Norwegian and international non-governmental organizations. Norway headed the second meeting of the Afghanistan donor group in New York in 1997. Our support to the people of Afghanistan is based on a strong commitment towards a negotiated solution to the armed conflict.

The recent escalation of the military conflict in Afghanistan and the suffering it has caused civilians gives reason for grave concern. We fully support the efforts made by the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNSMA) and the Special Envoy to bring about a ceasefire. We urge the warring parties, and in particular the Taliban, to resume negotiations aimed at establishing a broad-based, multi-ethnic and fully representative Government in Kabul. No efforts should be spared in persuading the parties that the conflict cannot be resolved through warfare.

Regional cooperation is crucial in the process of resolving the continuing military confrontation, which is posing a serious threat to regional and international peace and security. In this respect, the Tashkent declaration was a step in the right direction. We appeal to the parties of the "six plus two" group, in particular the Taliban, to respect the fundamental principles for a peaceful settlement of the conflict and to make good their stated commitment to a political settlement. Likewise, we call upon the countries in the region to uphold their common agreement not to provide military support of any kind to any of the parties to the conflict in Afghanistan.

Norway is gravely concerned by the violations of human rights, including those inflicted on ethnic minorities, women and girls, and by violations of international humanitarian law in Afghanistan. We urge all factions to respect the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to which Afghanistan has subscribed. An end must be put to the flow of arms which is subjecting men, women and children to the arbitrary rule of warring factions. Later this year, we will commemorate the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Norway strongly denounces the recruitment of child soldiers and urges the warring factions to respect this Convention. The parties should also respect Security Council resolution 1261 (1999) on

children in situations of armed conflict, adopted by the Council this very week.

We are equally alarmed by reports of forced displacement of civilians and by the deteriorating humanitarian conditions of internally displaced people. The Secretary-General rightly emphasizes that the prime responsibility for the welfare of the internally displaced people lies with those who have displaced them from their homes. Norway calls for a rapid return of the displaced civilians and joins the appeal of the Secretary-General to ensure the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

International aid to civilians is dependent on the presence and the free movement of all United Nations personnel. As the Tashkent declaration confirmed, the United Nations must continue to play a central and impartial role in international efforts to achieve a peaceful solution to the conflict in Afghanistan. We urge the parties to ensure secure access for humanitarian organizations and to allow relief agencies to provide assistance in an effective and efficient manner to all victims.

In our view, there cannot be a lasting peace so long as the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate. Norway strongly supports the strategic framework under United Nations auspices, by which humanitarian assistance is placed in the context of the political process of peace and reconciliation.

Finally, we appreciate the continued efforts of the Special Envoy and the role of United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan in working towards a peaceful settlement of the conflict.

The President: The next speaker is the representative of Islamic Republic of Iran. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Danesh-Yazdi (Islamic Republic of Iran): At the outset, I wish to extend the appreciation of my delegation to you, Sir, and to other members of the Security Council for convening this important meeting with a view to debating the critical situation in Afghanistan.

I feel bound to express our gratitude to the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy, Ambassador Brahimi, as well as to the personnel of the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNSMA) for the dedicated and tireless work they are sincerely engaged in. I wish Ambassador Brahimi a speedy recovery and good health. The Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran highly values and fully supports Ambassador Brahimi's endeavours aimed at bringing peace and normalcy to Afghanistan. In our view, such efforts are indispensable if the situation in Afghanistan is not to deteriorate even further.

The latest military offensive launched by the Taliban, and the changing fortunes of the parties that followed, vividly demonstrated, once again, that there can be no military solution to the protracted Afghan conflict. Afghanistan is a multi-ethnic society, governed over the centuries through ethnic harmony and a delicate mechanism of power-sharing in which all ethnic and linguistic groups could play a role. The Afghan history and experiences of similar societies illustrate that the gain or loss of territory through military operations can never resolve any deep-rooted crisis and bring peace. Therefore, it should be recognized that the militarist policy adopted by the Taliban and their foreign supporters — a policy that seeks domination by one group over Afghan society — is a naive policy and lies at the origin of the current situation in Afghanistan.

The all-out Taliban offensive to the north over the past few weeks, despite the substantial reinforcements of personnel and material the Taliban received from outside Afghanistan, did not result in any significant military victory but, most unfortunately, only succeeded in creating a human tragedy by rendering hundreds of thousands Afghans homeless. The term "scorched earth", as employed by the office of the United Nations Coordinator for Afghanistan in the news release of 14 August 1999, best describes the brutal and ruthless policy of the Taliban against the inhabitants of the Shomali plains — a policy that could be considered tantamount to ethnic cleansing.

The forced displacement of Tajik inhabitants of the region — taking a large number of them to the remote south-eastern city of Jalalabad, on the one hand, and burning their villages to the ground and setting fire to their crops in order to deter them from coming back, on the other — is a clear violation of international humanitarian law by the Taliban. The same policy has been implemented against Hazara people over the past few years. There have also been reports of sizeable movements of civilians to north of the front line, into the Panjsher Valley. Hundreds of thousands of civilians are in dire need of basic emergency items to survive.

The demands on the Islamic Republic of Iran and northern neighbours of Afghanistan are tremendous,

beyond the resources available. We urge the international community to provide assistance through the United Nations to the desperate people of those regions. This Council is expected to take appropriate actions so as to deter the Taliban from their senseless campaign against the civilian population.

The recourse of the Taliban to violence against ethnic groups is tending to further polarize the multi-ethnic Afghan society and consequently aggravate the situation. This trend poses a serious threat to the future of the country as a whole. Let me be very frank in expressing our deep concern that the path taken by the Taliban may jeopardize Afghanistan's unity and lead to a situation that endangers the national security of the neighbouring countries and thus further destabilizes the region. The Islamic Republic of Iran emphasizes the need for respecting the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of Afghanistan and calls on all to refrain from adopting any policy likely to endanger Afghanistan's existence as a sovereign and united country.

To our great regret, the Taliban continue to disregard the repeated demands of the international community that they desist from insisting on a military solution to the conflict and seriously engage in negotiations aimed at settling the conflict peacefully, as demanded by the Security Council in its resolutions 1193 (1998) and 1214 (1998), as well as the declaration of the "six plus two" group. The latest large-scale offensive launched by the Taliban immediately after the "six plus two" meeting in Tashkent — which their own representatives attended — clearly demonstrates their contempt for the wishes of the international community as expressed in the Tashkent declaration urging the parties to resume political negotiations aimed at achieving the goal of establishing a broad-based, multi-ethnic and fully representative Government.

The intransigent attitude of the Taliban, in defiance of numerous General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, has been the root cause of the agony and suffering of the Afghan people over the past few years and in practice has perpetuated instability and lingering problems in the region and beyond. The Security Council should not fail to seriously address this highly significant matter in order to restore stability and normalcy in that country. The continuation of military offensives by the Taliban, which could not be carried out without outside political and military support, certainly destabilizes the whole region. The engagement of an ever-growing number of non-Afghan nationals, fighting alongside the Taliban forces, could change the Afghan conflict into a transnational one. The persistence of this dangerous element could cause the conflict to spread beyond Afghan borders.

The Islamic Republic of Iran continues to be adversely affected by the negative consequences arising from the chaotic situation and lawlessness in Afghanistan. Heavy traffic in drugs and arms, terrorism and instability close to common borders are among the consequences my country has been suffering from over the past two decades. To combat these menaces, we have paid a very high price in terms of human and material resources, and we stand ready to cooperate with the international community with a view to finding a just and lasting solution to the Afghanistan conflict. In this context, we are willing to continue working with the Secretary-General's Special Envoy to persuade Afghan groups, particularly the Taliban, to abandon fighting and engage in serious political negotiations.

Last but not least, after more than a year, the issue of the tragic murder of the staff of the Consulate-General of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) correspondent in Mazar-e-Sharif by Taliban forces in the wake of their offensive against that northern Afghan city in August 1998, is still pending and remains unresolved. The Taliban — as the international community, including the Council itself, is fully aware — continues to stubbornly disregard the rules of international law and has yet to implement Security Council resolution 1214 (1999), which in its operative paragraph 5 condemns this crime and calls upon

> "the Taliban to cooperate with the United Nations in investigating these crimes with a view to prosecuting those responsible".

I would like to emphasize that the Islamic Republic of Iran is determined to pursue vigorously the matter, as we have in the past. We remain hopeful that the Council and the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General will continue their valuable efforts in this regard.

The threat which the protracted crisis in Afghanistan poses to regional and international peace and security, and the unacceptable, inhumane and horrifying situation in which millions of Afghan people now find themselves require immediate attention by the Security Council. We believe that the Security Council needs to review the situation in Afghanistan with a view to taking a number of concrete measures in line with its previous resolutions

and aimed at compelling the Taliban to heed the demands of the international community concerning peace in Afghanistan. Such effective and timely measures by the Security Council will undoubtedly help save lives in Afghanistan and shield the region and beyond from the threats and problems stemming from the continuation of the war in that country.

The President: The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of India. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Sharma (India): Mr. President, we express our appreciation to you for convening this timely open debate of the Security Council to consider the situation prevailing in Afghanistan. Such open debates are a healthy development in the Council's work which we hope will be maintained.

This meeting of the Council comes in the midst of one more manifestation of the Taliban's relentless pursuit of the mirage of military solutions for the resolution of the civil conflict in Afghanistan. Its recent campaign in the Shomali plains, with direct external assistance and involvement of foreign defence personnel in operations as well as planning, has displayed its complete disregard of the international community's efforts for a peaceful settlement of the Afghanistan situation. This Taliban campaign against the forces of the Government of the Islamic State of Afghanistan has been vicious. Its methods include the targeting of the civilian population, the brutal massacre of innocent people, the torching of houses, the use of bombs, the destruction of standing crops and the deliberate displacement of women and children. These acts constitute base crimes and follow the same pattern as the massacre of thousands of innocent people in the wake of the Taliban capture of Mazar-e-Sharif in August 1998 and the systematic "ethnic cleansing" in Bamiyan in April/May this year.

It is most pertinent that all these actions are contrary, indeed repulsive, to Afghan traditions. They reflect an inspiration derived from outside Afghanistan. The international community has taken serious and adverse note of the criminal conduct of the Taliban and the negative implication of the Taliban phenomenon for peace and security in Afghanistan and the region. The Council must accordingly take meaningful and effective measures in this regard.

There cannot be a military solution to the civil conflict in Afghanistan. The way forward lies through peaceful discussions and negotiations for which President Rabbani, Commander Ahmad Shah Masoud and other leaders of the Islamic Front for the Defence of Afghanistan have shown readiness and commitment, and through the formation of a broad-based government which truly represents all political forces and ethnic groups in the country, is dedicated to the urgent task of national reconstruction, is independent, is autonomous in action, and works for the good of all the people of Afghanistan. Such a government will be rooted in the Afghan personality, which transcends ethnic consciousness and has sustained itself through the long travail of violence and strife. The international community must nurture and strengthen that personality. The Taliban and their foreign mentor cannot be allowed to create and perpetuate ethnic cleavages to pursue their vested interests.

The unity, independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Afghanistan is vital for the Afghan people. It is also critical for peace, stability, security and economic development in the entire region, of which India is a part. The international community must act purposefully to ensure that those who continue to imperil regional peace and stability through obscurantist ideology, extremist violence and the distortion of faith are prevented from doing so. The cessation of interference in Afghanistan from across its southern borders is essential for the return of peace to that country.

The territories in Afghanistan which the Taliban have occupied through military force have become a breeding ground for international terrorism. International terrorist groups find a safe haven here and in the areas straddling Afghanistan's southern borders. There are numerous training camps for terrorists, and from these camps and bases extremists and terrorists go out into the region and beyond to carry out acts which are the very antithesis of all civilized life. The international community cannot remain indifferent to the dangers which emanate from the Taliban and their nexus with terrorism. India is a victim of terrorism and is acutely alive to the death and destruction perpetrated by these terrorists. We call on the international community to take collective action against these terrorists and their mentor.

Historically, as well as under the internationally accepted conventions and norms of behaviour, diplomats are protected. A year ago, in a sordid and brutal action, the Taliban murdered some Iranian diplomats, disregarding all international norms for treatment of diplomats. Even though this action has been condemned by the international community, which has asked the

Taliban to bring the culprits to book, there has been no substantial progress in the investigations, as the Secretary-General has also stated recently. Should the international community sit and wait while the perpetrators of this outrageous crime and their masters roam about freely? A message, loud and clear, should go out from this Chamber today to the Taliban that the perpetrators of these crimes must be made to face the consequences of their acts.

The Taliban-controlled areas have emerged as one of the largest producers of narcotic substances in the world. There is a close nexus between the Taliban and the mafias operating across Afghanistan's southern border and in the region in promoting this diabolical trade. The menace grows, and firm international action is the need of the hour.

The efforts of the international community to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan have to be active and purposeful. We are convinced that these efforts have to be channelized through the United Nations. We are equally convinced that they have to be broad-based. All countries that have an interest and influence in Afghanistan must be brought within the ambit of these peacemaking efforts. Narrow and segmented approaches cannot work. We support the United Nations efforts for peacemaking in Afghanistan and appreciate the untiring efforts of the Secretary-General's Special Envoy to bring different Afghan groups together in the quest for peace.

India has historical, cultural and civilizational ties with the Afghan people. Hence, the continuing strife and violence in Afghanistan is all the more painful for us. We have contributed, as best we can, to alleviate the suffering of the Afghan people by sending humanitarian assistance. Our efforts in this direction will continue both bilaterally and through the United Nations system. The international community needs to take urgent action to ensure timely assistance to all Afghan people. We hope that the constraints on delivery of humanitarian assistance which were brought out in Secretary-General's report of last year (A/53/346) will soon be overcome. It is essential to do so, as, with the onset of winter, it will become even more difficult to deliver aid to the needy and poor in Afghanistan. Immediate steps in this direction are therefore required.

India will continue to play, as it has done in the past, a positive and constructive role towards bringing peace to Afghanistan.

Finally, we were very much concerned to learn of the sudden hospitalization of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Ambassador Lakhdar Brahimi, and we wish him a speedy recovery with all our heart.

The President: I thank the representative of India for his kind words expressed to me.

The next speaker on my list is the representative of Japan. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Takasu (Japan): I would like to welcome the opportunity to express, under your presidency, Japan's view on the situation in Afghanistan. First of all, we listened with concern to the useful update on the situation by Mr. Prendergast this morning. Japan shares deep concern over the latest developments in Afghanistan, where fighting among the factions has intensified. Many innocent people have been forcibly displaced from their homes. The suffering of the civilian population is increasing, and there is concern among neighbouring countries about the influx of refugees.

Japan supports the valuable efforts being made by the Secretary-General and particularly by his Special Envoy, Ambassador Brahimi, and also at the field level by the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan to restore peace to Afghanistan. We recognize that they are working under extremely difficult conditions, and we encourage them to continue their worthy endeavours.

Japan also supports efforts made by the "six plus two" group, composed of six States bordering on Afghanistan as well as the Russian Federation and the United States. Japan wishes to assure this group of its support and hopes that their work will complement that of the United Nations and will promote an early settlement of the conflict.

Today, I would like to highlight four elements that are essential for the achievement of a peaceful settlement of this prolonged conflict.

First, the Taliban and the other Afghan warring factions should immediately cease fighting and resume their dialogue. A durable peace can be achieved only through peaceful means. The ultimate objective of such dialogue should be to establish a broad-based, multi-ethnic and representative government, which will ensure a durable peace throughout the country. Japan, for its part, stands ready to have a meeting among the

Afghan factions in which they can engage in dialogue in neutral surroundings, with the aim of finding a way towards achieving national reconciliation.

Secondly, the countries concerned, and neighbouring countries in particular, should not interfere in the conflict, but rather should use their influence on the warring factions to bring the fighting to an end. It is especially important that all concerned stop extending military assistance or supplying arms to the warring factions, and that they refrain from any other measures that could prolong the hostilities.

Thirdly, in view of the tremendous human suffering of the Afghan people, the international community should continue to provide humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan. The Afghan support group is performing a crucial service by exploring ways to ensure the effective and efficient implementation of such assistance. Recognizing the need to strengthen the work of the Afghan support group, Japan hosted its fourth meeting in Tokyo last December.

In the past ten years Japan has provided humanitarian assistance amounting to $400 million through United Nations agencies and programmes. Most recently, Japan funded the Afghan refugee repatriation programme in the Azra and Tizin districts which contributed to the repatriation of 20,000 refugees. We will continue to commit ourselves to extending such support in the future.

Fourthly, the international community should convey to the leaders of the Afghan factions and people a clear message of the commitment of the international community to extend assistance for their efforts to reconstruct the country once the fighting ceases, peace is restored and a broad-based, multi-ethnic and representative Government is formed. The establishment of such a Government is indispensable for the provision of assistance by the international community for the reconstruction of the country.

We hope that such a strong commitment by the international community will encourage the factions to come to the negotiating table and settle the dispute peacefully. Japan, for its part, renews its own commitment and readiness to contribute to the reconstruction of Afghanistan once peace has been restored.

The path to peace in Afghanistan is a long and arduous one. I believe, however, that the international community must continue to strive to convince the parties to the conflict that the achievement of a durable peace will be to their benefit, and Japan will continue to play an active role in this endeavour.

The President: The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Tajikistan. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Alimov (Tajikistan) *(interpretation from Russian):* The Republic of Tajikistan expresses profound gratitude to you, Sir, and to the Security Council for having taken the initiative of holding an open meeting to discuss a new, extremely dangerous development in the situation in Afghanistan and, more importantly, possible actions that the Council might take to ensure unconditional compliance with its decisions, as well as with the resolutions of the General Assembly.

As we have repeatedly emphasized in our statements in United Nations forums, Tajikistan is very seriously concerned at the situation that prevails in neighbouring Afghanistan, because the hot breath from the Afghan conflict is something that we feel in our immediate vicinity and all along the 1,500-kilometre border we share with that country.

Our concern also stems from a desire to see relations between Tajikistan and Afghanistan — which are based on the historical, cultural and religious communality of our peoples — oriented not to the past so much as to the future. We sincerely cherish these relations, and we too suffer at what is happening now with the fraternal Afghan people. We want, as soon as possible, to see peace and national concord restored to Afghanistan. We would like to see Afghanistan, which has made a unique contribution to the development of world civilization and which was a founding Member of the United Nations, rise up from the ashes into which it has been turned by this totally irrational protracted internal conflict.

We would like to see that, as soon as possible, there be a halt to the suffering of the people living in the rich land of Afghanistan. We would like to see families separated by war be reunited, and to see Afghan children go to school without any trepidation. We would like mothers able to raise their children together with the fathers of those children. We would like girls to feel that they are full members of their society with some hope of a dignified future. We would like the men to compete not on the field of battle but in creative endeavours to rehabilitate their country. We would like all Afghanis to have equal access to all areas of social and political life.

We would like the achievements of the Afghan people in the area of science and culture to become accessible to the whole world, and finally, we would like Afghanistan once again to appear before the international community in all of its beautiful diversity and magnificence.

To our profound regret, the reality is still very far from what I have described. Afghanistan continues to sink deeper and deeper into the abyss of war and the destruction of the very basis of life for its long-suffering people. Fear and hopelessness, starvation, diseases, poverty — these remain the grim lot of the overwhelming majority of the Afghan population, whose living standards are practically the lowest in the world.

Present-day realities in Afghanistan mean a regime introduced by the Taliban, which reminds one of a medieval obscurantist order. It means ethnic cleansing, persecutions on the basis of ethnicity and religion, forcible displacements, repression and other abuses against hundreds of thousands of Afghans. It means massive, systematic and gross violations of human rights as a whole, including the rights of women and girls and the norms of international humanitarian law. And, finally, it means open support for international terrorism and the drug business, which pose a real threat to national and regional security.

The leadership of Tajikistan is profoundly alarmed at this turn of events in Afghanistan. We are particularly concerned by the ideological devotion of the Taliban to extremist, religious stereotypes and, as a consequence of this, the fact that they have turned the regions of Afghanistan that they control into a base to organize subversive action against neighbouring and other States. We reaffirm our determination, in cooperation with our close friends, to impede the further spread of this kind of activities.

We agree with many of the alarming assessments we have heard at today's meeting about the situation in Afghanistan and around it, and we believe that the blame for this impasse — when fulfilment of resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly are being blocked, as are international efforts to resolve the Afghan conflict — lies exclusively with the Taliban. We call upon the leadership of the Taliban movement immediately to give up any hope of military victory, to halt their military action and enter into peace negotiations. Readiness to this was repeatedly confirmed by the United Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan, with the ultimate goal of forming a broadly representative Afghan Government.

We call upon the Taliban movement to heed the demands of the international community and put an end to their policy of the physical and moral destruction of their own people, to put an end to their barbaric attitude to their own historical, cultural and religious traditions and, on the threshold of the twenty-first century, finally to give their people some prospect of their returning to international relations as a full participant.

We also emphasize the need to halt direct foreign military interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan, which seeks not to develop that country on the path to peace and prosperity but to push it further into the abyss of total destruction.

Tajikistan is firmly convinced that the United Nations and its Security Council should not disregard what is now occurring in Afghanistan. We urge the Council to give a second wind to international efforts to promote normalization of the situation in that country and in the region as a whole. We believe that the Council should give an objective assessment of the action of those who are undoing those efforts, and that it should take concrete measures to force the initiators and the perpetrators of the short-sighted, destructive policy on Afghanistan to heed the clear demands in the resolutions of the Council relating to the Afghan settlement.

We believe that the group of neighbours and friends of Afghanistan — the so-called "six plus two" group — should make a more important contribution. We believe that members of this group, having departed from their understandings achieved within the framework of that group, and also from the obligations that were adopted at the Tashkent meeting, are obliged to agree as soon as possible on a specific formula for resolving the crisis in Afghanistan, which would be most in keeping with the aspirations of the people of that country and would not harm the interests of other States of the region — of course, in full compliance with the resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council of the United Nations.

Tajikistan is prepared to do everything it can to support any international efforts under the aegis of the United Nations to bring about a radical change in the situation in Afghanistan. In this connection we again reaffirm the proposal that was made earlier by the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Mr. Emomali Rakhmonov, regarding the need to convene an international conference on Afghanistan, the purpose of which would be to encourage the Afghan parties to enter

into serious talks on fundamental problems of an Afghan settlement and to give them every possible assistance in obtaining practical results in this respect.

The President: I thank the representative of Tajikistan for his statement.

The next speaker is the representative of Turkey. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and make his statement.

Mr. Vural (Turkey): Before commenting on Afghanistan, allow me, Sir, to express our deep gratitude to you personally and to all the members of the Council for the sympathy that has been expressed for the victims of the devastating earthquake in Turkey. The solidarity shown and the assistance provided by the international community in response to this human tragedy are deeply appreciated by the Turkish people and our Government. The continuation of the solidarity is of utmost importance and will help us to recover from this tragedy.

Turkey and Afghanistan enjoy a solid friendship, which is based on deep-rooted historical ties. This enables us to maintain contacts and to take initiatives with respect to all the Afghan groups.

There seems to be no end to the tragic suffering of the Afghan people, and the recent developments have compounded this painful situation. The continued fighting in Afghanistan is a source of serious concern for us. The crisis in Afghanistan impairs the overall stability in the region.

The launching of a large-scale military offensive by the Taliban just after the Tashkent summit, and reports of massive forced displacements of civilians from the areas where fighting has been raging, are alarming. We believe that all countries must refrain from complicating the already fragile internal balance in Afghanistan and prolonging the conflict.

My country is also deeply concerned about the human rights violations, the separation of women and children from their menfolk and the acts of religious extremism. Engagement with international terrorism and cultivation of and trafficking in narcotics, mainly emanating from the territories controlled by the Taliban, are also cause for concern.

Turkey appointed a coordinator for Afghanistan, at the level of ambassador, in September last year, with the objective of establishing contacts with the parties in Afghanistan and the interested States and contributing to finding a solution to the Afghan problem through peaceful means. Since then, our coordinator has visited Kabul, Mazar-e Sharif, Shibirgan, Kandahar, Taloqan and Badakshan, where he has held extensive talks with several representatives of the Afghan people. He also visited the neighbouring countries.

Our firsthand observations confirm the obvious. A ceasefire must be established without delay. We continue to believe that there is no military solution to the Afghan crisis. The preservation of the territorial integrity and independence of Afghanistan is of utmost importance. A lasting peace can be brought about only by the formation of a broad-based Government with the consensus and representation of all segments of Afghan society.

The ongoing crisis and the civil war in Afghanistan over two decades have caused extensive damage. The infrastructure, land cultivation, the industrial basis and medical services are totally destroyed. The country is in urgent need of rehabilitation.

Despite the continuing fighting, we must all, with the United Nations in a central role, encourage the Afghan parties to a dialogue and a solution. Turkey has always supported and will continue to support the United Nations in its efforts to find a durable solution to the Afghan problem.

Enhanced bilateral diplomatic activity among the interested countries will also contribute to the process aimed at finding a solution to this question. Current setbacks must not discourage us. We also believe that the Organization of the Islamic Conference should maintain its useful cooperation with the United Nations regarding Afghanistan.

In spite of our relatively modest resources, and despite the recent earthquake, Turkey is currently working on launching a humanitarian aid programme which will directly target the Afghan people as a whole. We are giving priority to the most needy, among them the disabled, infants and the widows. We believe that the humanitarian aid schemes for Afghanistan should be broadbased, covering all segments of Afghan society. Turkey's contribution to the United Nations humanitarian aid programme to Afghanistan is also under consideration.

Finally, may I express through you, Sir, our wishes for a speedy recovery to Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, who has done an excellent job in bringing the parties together for a peaceful solution.

The President: I thank the representative of Turkey for his kind words addressed to me and to the members of the Council.

The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Uzbekistan. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Vohidov (Uzbekistan): It is a great pleasure for me to address the Security Council under your presidency, Sir, in this debate on the agenda item entitled "The situation in Afghanistan".

The Republic of Uzbekistan is deeply concerned about the recent escalation of military confrontation in Afghanistan and considers it a major threat to international and regional peace and security, particularly to the region of Central Asia.

I would like to stress that the Afghan conflict has grown from an internal problem of Afghanistan into a conflict of regional scale. Dangerous consequences of this war can be seen today, not only inside that war-torn country but also beyond its borders and in practically all of its immediate neighbours. In this context, some of our main concerns are the use of Afghan territory for terrorist activities and for the training and concealing of international terrorists and their organizations, a policy whose consequences create a great danger not only for the region of Central Asia itself, but also for wider international peace and stability; the growing involvement of mercenaries from other countries in the Afghan conflict, which is acquiring a dangerous character; and the use of Afghan territory for the cultivation, production and trafficking of drugs.

The result of these facts is that Afghanistan has today become one of the main exporters of international terrorism and religious extremism, as well as the largest producer and supplier of narcotics in the world. The whole international community suffers from this dangerous activity, which is spreading in most parts of Afghan territory.

One of the main concerns of my Government is the continued supply of arms and ammunition to the parties to the Afghan conflict and the unabated foreign interference in Afghanistan. We are confident that it is necessary to cease such interference immediately in order to create the necessary conditions for the resumption of a peaceful dialogue.

We resolutely condemn recent reports on the mass killings and forced displacements of civilians, as well as other violations of human rights in Afghanistan.

We welcome the statement of the Secretary-General delivered on the occasion of the first anniversary of the murder of Iranian diplomats in Mazar-e-Sharif, especially his appeal to the Taliban to carry out a serious and speedy investigation into this grave violation of norms of international law.

The escalation of hostilities has brought new sufferings for the people of the country and has resulted in the suspension of deliveries of international humanitarian aid to Afghanistan. We hope that the Afghan parties will respect the norms of international and humanitarian law and do everything possible to create the necessary conditions for the United Nations and other international humanitarian organizations to provide humanitarian assistance to all in need of it in Afghanistan.

Uzbekistan believes that the United Nations must continue to play its central and impartial role in international efforts towards a peaceful resolution of the Afghan conflict, and, in this regard, we support the efforts of the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, his Special Envoy for Afghanistan, Mr. Brahimi, and those of the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish Mr. Brahimi, an outstanding diplomat in the United Nations, a speedy recovery.

At the present time, the work of the "six plus two" group, which has conducted its activities under the auspices of the United Nations, has acquired great significance and gained unique experience in multilateral diplomacy, promoting by joint efforts the creation of the favourable external preconditions for the negotiation process of the intra-Afghan fighting parties. The group has taken a special place in the international efforts aimed at the achievement of the political settlement of the Afghan crisis and, from our point of view, has proved itself to be the most efficient international mechanism for the consolidation of the efforts of the friends and neighbouring countries of Afghanistan.

The recent meeting of the group in Tashkent on 19 July this year adopted the political Declaration on Fundamental Principles for a Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict in Afghanistan and once again reaffirmed the common adherence and support of all member countries to the activity of the group. The Tashkent meeting of the "six plus two" and its political Declaration have provided a solid basis for the achievement of a regional consensus among the members of the group, elaborated common principles and a single approach to the resolution of the Afghan conflict, and provided an opportunity for the Afghan parties to renew the negotiating process.

The position of the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan on the settlement of the Afghan conflict fully coincides with the provisions of the Tashkent Declaration and consists of the following points: that there is no military solution to the Afghan conflict, which can be resolved only through political settlement in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council; the central and impartial role of the United Nations in the international efforts to achieve a peaceful resolution of the Afghan conflict; firm commitment to the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and national unity of Afghanistan; formation of a broad-based, multi-ethnic and fully representative Afghan government; and cessation of foreign military support to any fighting Afghan party and the prevention of the use of the territories of neighbouring countries for such purposes.

I would like to note once again that the recent escalation of military action in Afghanistan clearly demonstrates to all of us the necessity of further coordination and strengthening of the international efforts. Proceeding from this opinion, the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan has proposed to the member Governments of the "six plus two" group the holding of a meeting of the group at the level of Ministers for Foreign Affairs during the general debate of the forthcoming fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly. That would be the second meeting of the Ministers of the group, with the aim of conducting further discussions of the ways of achieving a peaceful solution to the Afghan conflict.

The President: I thank the representative of Uzbekistan for his kind words addressed to me.

The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Egypt. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Aboul Gheit (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): For many months, and with increasing distress and concern, Egypt has followed the continuing military confrontations between the warring Afghan parties. The recent armed clashes represent a dangerous escalation of the situation, especially because of the repercussions on civilians suffering from their destructive effects and forced displacement to other regions. This is something my country strongly condemns, and it is why Egypt invites the international community to provide assistance and to work to put an end to the suffering of the Afghan people, and to provide humanitarian assistance to the refugees.

The situation of civilians in Afghanistan has become a source of constant concern to the international community, especially now when we are hearing that one of the Afghan parties is practising a "scorched earth" policy in order to change the demographic map of Afghanistan. If this allegation proves true, such a policy would undoubtedly be a repudiation and grave violation of the agreements and commitments that should be, and are expected to be, adhered to by all Afghan parties.

Egypt is following with a great deal of interest the discussions conducted by the Security Council on the situation in Afghanistan, given its obligation, as a Member State of the United Nations, to work to establish peace and stability in that part of the world. Likewise, Egypt, as a country of the Middle East region — which has a role to play in Central Asia and is affected by what happens there — sees stability in Central Asia as an opportunity to profit from their resources and carry out economic and social development.

Following very closely the situation in Afghanistan and its repercussions on the neighbouring regions and those further away, we have noted the tendency among terrorist groups to exploit Afghan territory and the lack of a strong central authority in order to export terrorism to other pars of the world and to train terrorists there. This is something my country condemns, and we ask the international community to deal with this situation.

Establishing stability and peace in Afghanistan would undoubtedly play an important role in preserving the peace and security of the world as a whole, particularly of the Central Asian region. It is for this reason that we very much hope that we will see the Afghan parties and the other forces interested in the Afghan situation, as well as neighbouring countries, succeed in achieving a real easing of the situation. This would once again make Afghanistan a stable and active

member of the international community. Key steps in this direction would undoubtedly be for the outside parties to refrain from giving material and military support to the warring parties and to respect the sovereignty and unity of the Afghan territory.

The first step to putting an end to the conflict in Afghanistan begins with ending the supply of weapons to all the warring parties. This means that international parties who can exert influence in this area must bring strong pressure to bear in order to convince the Afghan factions to continue negotiations and political dialogue under the auspices of the United Nations, so as to achieve a national reconciliation that takes into account the interests of all the parties. In this context we underscore the importance of establishing a broadened interim Government that would include the different factions and that would lay the foundations for peaceful and political coexistence among all the components of Afghan society.

While Egypt supports the efforts of the "six plus two" group to resolve the crisis, including that group's Tashkent declaration of 19 July regarding a settlement of the conflict and the 8 August communiqué of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Egypt calls as well for the full implementation of the resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly concerning Afghanistan.

Egypt also calls on all the concerned parties to strengthen their efforts to put an end to the bloodshed and the squandering of energy and resources in Afghanistan and to alleviate rapidly the suffering of the civilian population. We also invite the Afghan parties to relinquish the use of force, bring about an immediate end to the killing and begin negotiations on a final settlement of the conflict. In this context, it is our hope that Ambassador Brahimi will be able to resume his positive and active role, and we wish him a complete recovery.

The President: The next speaker is the representative of Turkmenistan. I invite her to take a seat at the Council table and to make her statement.

Ms. Ataeva (Turkmenistan) (*spoke in Russian*): Allow me first to thank through you, Sir, the members of the Security Council for allowing us to state our position in this forum.

The item before us today is of particular importance. Turkmenistan has traditionally maintained respectful, good-neighbourly relations with Afghanistan, free from any short-term political interests.

The internal conflict in Afghanistan, which has now lasted many years and which was caused by foreign intervention 20 years ago, is a source of grief in our country. As has been repeatedly stressed by the President of Turkmenistan, Afghans are dear to us, and we are prepared, to the extent possible, to help them find a peaceful settlement to the conflict.

Turkmenistan has been and remains the only country that maintains an ongoing presence in Afghanistan. I am referring to our two consulates in Herat and Mazar-e-Sharif. Although the domestic political situation in Afghanistan has changed, the consular offices of Turkmenistan have remained, because they ensure the normal functioning of our border — a border almost 900 kilometres long that needs to be managed. For neutral Turkmenistan the border is not a fence; it is an instrument for carrying out a foreign policy that seeks to help establish an atmosphere of peace, security and mutually advantageous partnership in the region. Turkmenistan will maintain relations with Afghans irrespective of what position they adopt. Turkmenistan respects the choice of the Afghans themselves particularly as regards what kind of life they should build and what rules they should adhere to.

Turkmenistan believes that relations between Turkmenistan and Afghanistan are not an intergovernmental privilege but reflect a mutual attraction between two peoples and their unchanging recognition of each other. The main thing today is to help the Afghans to find concord and, with active international support, to embark on a long-term programme for the rehabilitation of their country. This was the precise approach adopted during the two rounds of talks between key Afghan factions in Ashkhabad at the beginning of the year. Results began to be achieved, direct talks were started, and the first signs of a possible agreement emerged. However, that process did not receive any real assessment. Apparently we were not prepared for this event, and various attempts were made, at various other levels and using other formats, to try to resolve the Afghan problem.

In this case, we believe that quantity has not led to quality. All it takes is for a process to encounter an obstacle and it is abandoned and something new is started. The scattering of the efforts of the international community — this lurching from one initiative to another without giving any one a real chance to be successful, or concentrating all efforts on just one — not only has not

improved the situation; in our view, it has made things worse.

We all agree as to the central role to be played by our Organization in coordinating the efforts of the international community. In that respect, we call upon it to be more active and to focus its efforts on one goal: the resumption of direct inter-Afghan dialogue without any discriminatory evaluations of any Afghan party, and particularly without the imposition of any formulas or outside participants. Ongoing contact between the parties to the conflict, under any circumstances and whatever the consequences, is a step towards resolving the conflict. The United Nations will encounter failures and setbacks; no one is immune to them. But one cannot undertake efforts only if the results of those efforts are going to be successful.

We think that in the efforts of the United Nations and of all those concerned to see a solution to the Afghan conflict, an important role should be played by countries that bear a particular responsibility for the fate of peoples, in particular the five permanent members of the Security Council, States that are the immediate neighbours of Afghanistan, and the major regional Powers — India, Turkey and Saudi Arabia.

For our part, Turkmenistan, which has direct ongoing relations with the parties to the Afghan conflict, is prepared to continue to promote the process of seeking peace, with the agreement of the Afghans. For Turkmenistan, the main point here is the Afghan people's choice — a people that possesses the wisdom, experience and courage to take any decisions, even the most difficult ones.

We were deeply saddened at the news of Mr. Brahimi's illness, and we would ask you, Mr. President, to convey to him our good wishes for a speedy recovery.

The President: The next speaker on my list is the representative of Pakistan. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Haque (Pakistan): Mr. President, we are happy to see you preside over these important deliberations on the situation in Afghanistan.

Today the Council is considering once again the unfortunate situation in Afghanistan, which first came to its attention almost two decades ago when the independent and sovereign nation of Afghanistan was brought under foreign occupation. Since then, the people of Afghanistan have continued to suffer the devastation inflicted on their country, initially by foreign occupation and later by civil conflict.

Having suffered under foreign occupation for more than a decade, the Afghan people had expected that with the withdrawal of foreign forces from their country, peace would return to Afghanistan, and that the international community, which had helped them in warding off foreign servitude, would also help them in reconstructing and rebuilding their shattered infrastructure, economy and lives. Unfortunately, soon after the withdrawal of foreign forces the Afghan people were left to their own devices at a time when they most needed external help, assistance and encouragement in rebuilding their society. The result was an internal power struggle which continues to rage today. The people of Afghanistan yearn for peace. Like all other peoples around the world, they too wish to build their lives, so that they can live in peace, security, honour and dignity. Unfortunately, this has not been possible because of the strife that continues to engulf that country.

Howsoever ardently may Pakistan desire to insulate itself from events in Afghanistan, it cannot do so. The 2,500-kilometre-long border shared by Pakistan and Afghanistan in an extremely difficult terrain has always been very porous. Many tribes straddle the border areas. Historically, there have been tribal movements from Afghanistan to Pakistan during the winter months and back to Afghanistan during the summers. Millions of Afghan refugees trekked to Pakistan after the Soviet occupation, and their movement to and from Afghanistan has since been largely uncontrolled. Pakistan has to cope with these realities. That is the fundamental difference between our situation and those of others, who, sitting at a distance, find it easy to tender advice or to level baseless, self-serving allegations against my country. The reality in Afghanistan also is that the Taliban controls 90 per cent of the territory, including the capital, Kabul. Pakistan and indeed the international community must recognize and live with this reality.

There is no country in the world which stands to gain more than Pakistan from the return of peace and stability in Afghanistan. Continuing conflict and instability in Afghanistan impose a very heavy burden on Pakistan. Around 1.8 million Afghan refugees, the largest group of refugees in any country in the world, continue to stay on in Pakistan. This body is well aware of the major economic and social costs that Pakistan has had to bear in providing basic amenities such as housing, education, medical facilities, drinking water,

infrastructure and so on to the Afghan refugees over the last few decades. The Council is aware also of the price that the people of Pakistan have paid and continue to pay in terms of the impact on the quality of their lives and on their personal security, the impact of drugs on the youth of Pakistan and a number of other factors. A peaceful and stable Afghanistan with its unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty fully intact is therefore in the highest national interest of Pakistan.

The Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mr. Mohammad Nawaz Sharif, is personally committed to finding a peaceful solution to the Afghan conflict. To this end, Pakistan has fully supported the efforts of the United Nations, the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy — to whom we send our best wishes and prayers for his early return to health — as well as the initiatives of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC).

Similarly, Pakistan has welcomed and is actively engaged in the "six plus two" process in the shared endeavour to bring normalcy to Afghanistan. In addition to our support to all international initiatives, we have also undertaken several rounds of shuttle diplomacy between the parties on either side of the Afghan divide in the hope of bridging their differences. The latest exercise was completed only a few days ago, when a delegation from Pakistan twice visited Tajikistan to meet with the representatives of Engineer Ahmad Shah Masoud and went to Kandahar to meet with the leader of the Taliban. I would, however, like to stress that our bilateral efforts to promote a peace process in Afghanistan are aimed at supplementing and not supplanting the efforts and the work of the United Nations, the OIC and the "six plus two" countries.

Durable peace in Afghanistan is possible only on the basis of an intra-Afghan consensus. Any solution to the Afghan conflict must be indigenous. Afghan history is witness to the fact that external solutions cannot be imposed on the fiercely independent people of Afghanistan. The international community is well aware that during the course of their history Afghans have never accepted domination by outsiders or foreign dispensations irrespective of the might or status of foreign Powers. This holds true even today. Pakistan understands this reality. It has no desire to interfere in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. Nor does it harbour any illusions about its ability to control or change the course of events in Afghanistan. It would be folly for any country to seek to control the destiny of the Afghan people.

Pakistan does not lend any support to any side in Afghanistan. We know, however, that some countries in the neighbourhood and beyond are doing so by various means, including provision of defence experts, military equipment and even landmines, and for reasons which are apparent and well known to the international community. As such, I will not belabour them. Our advice to these countries also is to desist from such efforts since they would only prolong the agony of the Afghan people, without succeeding in advancing their own perceived interests.

The international community must engage both Afghan sides and continue to encourage them to embrace peace through the establishment of a broad-based multi-ethnic Government in Afghanistan. In order to promote an intra-Afghan dialogue, it is imperative that all outside interference in Afghanistan must cease. The most glaring aspect of such interference is the supply of military equipment, which continues to stoke the fires of conflict in Afghanistan.

We agree with China's proposal made in the Security Council today for an arms embargo on Afghanistan. We have also in the past proposed the imposition of a verifiable arms embargo applicable to the whole of Afghanistan. We believe that this proposal merits serious consideration by this body since this is the only way to limit the ability of the Afghan factions to wage war against each other.

Such an embargo must also be accompanied by a comprehensive international programme for the reconstruction of Afghanistan and the rehabilitation of the refugees. Afghanistan has been totally ravaged by war. It has no infrastructure, roads, telecommunications or power. Its agricultural sector is almost non-existent. We believe that programmes for reconstruction and rehabilitation will provide a powerful incentive for peace in Afghanistan, since the Afghan people will see for themselves the tangible benefits of peace and stability.

Any policy of castigating, isolating or ostracizing one or more Afghan factions can only feed the flames of war in the volatile situation in Afghanistan. The international community must not be seen to be taking sides in the conflict. It is possible to argue that the Taliban believe that they are being unjustly treated by the international community. Despite the fact that they control 90 per cent of the territory, including the capital, and have successfully restored law and order in the areas under their control, the international community and the

United Nations continue to recognize another faction in Afghanistan as the legitimate Government. The Taliban would be right to wonder about the criteria by which international legitimacy and recognition are conferred by the United Nations. The Security Council should, in our view, give the Taliban an equal opportunity to be heard by the Council.

We have heard of some moves for the imposition of sanctions by the Security Council against the Taliban. We firmly believe that sanctions would be counter-productive. They would give rise to the feeling of injustice and victimization, which could strengthen extremist sentiments. Sanctions also would further impoverish the people of Afghanistan, but are unlikely to bring about any appreciable change in the political landscape of that country. It is through engagement and not isolation that the international community can hope and work to bring about peace in Afghanistan. It is therefore imperative that punitive measures be held in abeyance and efforts for peace be intensified.

The recent meeting of the "six plus two" group was an important event. For the first time, the two main Afghan parties met with the group. The Tashkent meeting marked the beginning of a process which seeks to bring together the two major Afghan factions in the process of a dialogue. Pakistan supports and fully subscribes to the decisions adopted by the "six plus two" group and believes that the group must continue and intensify its laudable efforts.

The resumption of hostilities immediately after the meeting of the "six plus two" was indeed extremely unfortunate. We do not believe that the Afghan issue can be resolved through conflict. We are disappointed at the resumption of conflict because it was after great efforts on our part that the Taliban were persuaded to participate in the meeting despite their reservations. The Taliban take the position that the latest round of hostilities was started by the forces of Engineer Ahmad Shah Masoud, which rocketed the Kabul airport immediately after the meeting. Pakistan does not wish to enter into a futile argument on the issue of who fired the first shot. We favour neither the continuation of the conflict nor its impact on civilians and their voluntary or involuntary displacement.

Having played host to millions of Afghan refugees for two decades, we are only too well aware and conscious of the plight of displaced persons. We also condemn terrorism by whomsoever committed in all its forms and manifestations. Having been subjected to State-sponsored terrorism from across our eastern border, we are only too conscious of the need to uproot this menace from the world.

Pakistan, and I am sure the Council, does not need lessons in civilized behaviour from those who are inflicting the worst kind of oppression and State-sponsored terrorism on people under their illegal occupation.

In the wake of the recent outbreak of fighting in Afghanistan, it has been alleged that some Pakistani nationals have been participating in the fighting, which is cited as proof of Pakistan's involvement in the conflict. This is a false and malicious allegation, and Pakistan rejects it. It is possible and likely that because of the porous border between Pakistan and Afghanistan, young Afghan refugees may have returned to Afghanistan and may well be participating in the fighting in support of one group or the other. It cannot be expected of Pakistan to force Afghan refugees to stay on in Pakistan if they wish to return to Afghanistan voluntarily. Many of these refugees have been brought up in Pakistan over the last two decades and could well be mistaken for Pakistanis. However, they cannot be given the status of Pakistanis by virtue of their having stayed in Pakistan as refugees. It is also not beyond the realm of possibility that some Pakistanis may have, on their own, slipped across our borders with Afghanistan. Surely Pakistan cannot be accused of being involved in the conflict on this untenable ground.

The debate on Afghanistan comes at an opportune moment. We hope that the Security Council will continue to encourage the promotion of a durable and just peace in Afghanistan. Peace and stability will return to Afghanistan not through threats of sanctions and punitive measures, but through engagement, reconstruction of the devastated country, rehabilitation of the people and the establishment of a multi-ethnic government through the process of an intra-Afghan dialogue.

The President: I thank the representative of Pakistan for his kind words addressed to me.

The next speaker inscribed on my list is Mr. Mokhtar Lamani, Permanent Observer of the Organization of the Islamic Conference to the United Nations to whom the Council has extended an invitation under rule 39 of the provisional rules of procedures. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Lamani *(spoke in Arabic)*: First of all, I should like to thank you sincerely, Mr. President, for allowing us to speak in this debate.

Having heard the complete, detailed report presented this morning by Mr. Prendergast, we feel deep anguish at the suffering of the Afghan people, which is living in such a difficult situation because of the exacerbation and continuation of fighting between the warring parties — fighting that goes hand in hand with the deterioration of living conditions, loss of human lives, destruction of goods, poverty and famine prevailing in all parts of Afghanistan, in addition to forced mass displacements, violations of human rights and discrimination against women.

The Conference of the Council of Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, held from 28 June to 1 July 1999 in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, reaffirmed that there can be no military solution to the Afghan crisis. In resolution 26/11 S, paragraph 4, the Council invited the Afghan parties to refrain from using force and to resume the path of dialogue. The same resolution, in paragraph 2, emphasized the importance of resuming negotiations without delay and without preconditions under the auspices of the United Nations and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) with a view to establishing a representative, multi-ethnic government on a broadened basis.

The continuation of war and the worsening of fighting are undoubtedly fuelled by the supply of weapons and military equipment to the warring parties. The United Nations and the OIC have reaffirmed in many resolutions the need to put an end to the flow of arms in Afghanistan and the need to refrain from intervening in the internal situation in Afghanistan.

Furthermore, the Ouagadougou conference reaffirmed the importance of strict respect for the principle of non-interference in Afghanistan and that the main responsibility for a peaceful settlement resides with the Afghan people themselves.

Nonetheless, the crisis, which is characterized by instability and a growing culture of drugs and their export, has become a major source of concern to the international community.

I would like to reaffirm the importance of supporting initiatives aimed at finding a peaceful solution. The OIC and its Secretary-General are prepared to support every effort to put an end to this tragedy. We await the day when harmony, reconciliation and unity will prevail so that the Afghan people can develop its resources and direct its energies towards the reconstruction of the country and its economic and social development.

Before concluding, I would like to commend the constant efforts of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. We also commend the tireless and sincere efforts of Mr. Brahimi, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan. I had the honour of accompanying him on one of his missions. May God give him good health and a prompt recovery.

It will not be easy to have Afghanistan emerge from its crisis. This necessarily will involve respect for local, regional and international commitments, as well as all relevant resolutions.

The President: There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. I should like to thank all those who have participated in this important debate for their very useful contributions, which will inform the Council's future deliberations on the item.

On behalf of the members of the Council, I should like to request the Secretariat to convey our best wishes to Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, and to wish him a full and speedy recovery.

The meeting rose at 5.55 p.m.